Please cancel Claims 11, 16 and 21 without prejudice to or disclaimer of the subject matter recited therein.

Please amend Claim 10 to read as follows.

1.   (Previously presented) An image processing apparatus for outputting a page image corresponding to print data inputted from an external source, comprising:

analyzing means for analyzing said print data at the time of outputting a first copy and generating a page image;

image spooling means for holding said page image at the time of outputting the first copy;

page image reading means for reading out said spooled page image at the time of outputting second and subsequent copies;

mechanical sorting means for performing mechanical sorting and paper ejection every copy;

discriminating means for discriminating whether said mechanical sorting means can be used or not and discriminating the maximum number of sorting page images which can be processed at once by said mechanical sorting means; and

switching means for, when a plural copy print is designated, discriminating whether to execute the plural copy print by using said image spooling means and said page

image reading means, or to execute the plural copy print without using said image spooling means and said page image reading means, in accordance with a discrimination result of said discriminating means and the designated number of copies.

2.   (Original) An apparatus according to claim 1, wherein in the case where it is determined by said discriminating means that said mechanical sorting means cannot be used or in the case where a print of the number of copies larger than the maximum number of sorting page images which can be processed at once by said mechanical sorting means is designated, said switching means allows the plural copy print to be executed by using said image spooling means and said page image reading means.

3.   (Original) An apparatus according to claim 2, wherein when a paper ejection mode is not a continuous sort, even if the print of the number of copies which is equal to or smaller than the maximum number of sorting page images which can be processed at once by said mechanical sorting means is designated, said switching means uses said image spooling means and said page image reading means.

4.   (Original) An apparatus according to claim 1, further comprising:

print data spooling means for holding said print data as much as at least one job; and

print data reading means for reading out said print data stored in said print data spooling means a predetermined number of times,

and wherein when said image spooling means and said page image reading means are not used, said plural copy print is performed by using said print data reading means.

5.   (Original) An apparatus according to claim 4, wherein in the case where said mechanical sorting means can be used, said print data reading means reads out the print data each time the page images of the maximum number of sorting page images which can be processed at once by said mechanical sorting means are outputted.

6.   (Original) An apparatus according to claim 1, wherein said image spooling means holds the page images compressed in a predetermined format.

7.   (Original) An apparatus according to claim 1, wherein said page image is a set of image data obtained by dividing one page into a plurality of band-like images or image data as much as one page.

8.   (Original) An apparatus according to claim 1, wherein said page image reading means outputs the page image compressed by a predetermined format while decompressing it.

9.   (Previously presented) An image processing method of outputting a page image corresponding to print data inputted from an external source, comprising:

an analyzing step of analyzing said print data at the time of outputting a first copy and generating a page image;

an image spool step of holding said page image at the time of outputting the first copy;

a page image reading step of reading out said spooled page image at the time of outputting second and subsequent copies;

a discriminating step of discriminating the maximum number of sorting page images which can be processed at once by mechanical sorting means for performing a mechanical sort paper ejection every copy; and

a determining step of determining whether to execute a plural copy print using said page image reading step, or to execute the plural copy print without using said page image reading step, in accordance with a discrimination result in said discriminating step and the designated number of print copies.

10.   (Currently amended) A ~~program storage~~ computer-readable medium which stores a program for executing an image processing method of outputting a page image corresponding to print data inputted from an external source, wherein said program comprises:

code for executing an analyzing step of analyzing said print data at the time of outputting a first copy and generating a page image;

code for executing an image spool step of holding said page image at the time of outputting the first copy;

code for executing a page image reading step of reading out said spooled page image at the time of outputting second and subsequent copies;

code for executing a discriminating step of discriminating the maximum number of sorting page images which can be processed at once by mechanical sorting means for performing a mechanical sort paper ejection every copy; and

code for executing a determining step of determining whether to execute a plural copy print using said page image reading step, or to execute the plural copy print without using said page image reading step, in accordance with a discrimination result in said discriminating step and the designated number of print copies.

Claims 11-22 (cancelled)